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About a month after the Battle of Columbus-Belmont, W. L. Utter, a young Confederate soldier than encamped "about 20 miles from Union City," wrote his cousin a brief account of the battle.[1] Almost as an afterthought, he added,

> "We have about fifteen thousand troops at this place, and four or five gun boats. Among the latter is the 'Turtle or Manassas' the wonder of the times. I went down to see the 'Turtle' this evening, it is a wonder for if the doors were shut down it looks like a turtles back, covered with iron, with a spear of steel in front about 8 or 10 feet long it has two guns on it, both eighty four pounders."

Apparently the strange looking craft captured the young man's imagination, for he added, "They are looking for a floating battery up the river, and when it comes up they will go up and attack Cairo. I would be glad to go on the Manassas, but I will not have an opportunity. Seven days from this, and I will have been in the service seven months, five more and I will be free again; and I hope that the war will be ended by that time."

Although the Manassas was pulled back down river to New Orleans shortly after she had attracted Private Utter's attention and was destined never to attack the Federal supply base at Cairo, she represents a significant chapter in the history of the early part of the War Between the States. By December of 1861, when Utter saw her on the Mississippi, she had already been seasoned by combat and had almost singlehandedly put the Federal fleet to rout on the Mississippi below New Orleans. Indeed, six months before the celebrated engagement between the ironclads "Monitor" and "Merrimac" (or "Virginia") off Hampton Roads, the "Manassas" had won the distinction of being the first ironclad on either side to see action in America. And while Utter's hopes that the war might be ended shortly may not have been based entirely upon the ironclad's expected effect on Yankee arms, many Confederates, civilians and military alike, entertained notions that the ram might sweep the Union from the Mississippi and break its blockade of Southern ports. Though its name has long since sunk into obscurity among naval records of the war, it raised hopes throughout the Confederacy for quick victory, and aroused forebodings of disaster in the pages of New York newspapers as early as the summer of 1861.

Southern expectations for success were soon to be dashed by the reality of Yankee firepower, and the career of the "Manassas" was brief but colorful. But the use of ironclads represents an important innovation in the evolution of naval warfare, a desperate, but pragmatic attempt by the Confederacy to use advancing technology to redress the military imbalance which favored the Union at the beginning of the war. The history of the construction and employment of the first ironclad merits more than the customary footnote or passing reference accorded it.

Although the Confederate Government quickly established a Department of the Navy, on February 21, 1861, and appointed Stephen R. Mallory as its head, the South had no navy to speak of at the beginning of the war. Mallory, a former United States Senator from Florida, immediately set about expanding the small nucleus of ships that had been seized from the Union into a fighting

force. Geography, however, had conspired to place most of the shipyards and necessary resources in the northern part of the country, and although Mallory attempted to overcome these difficulties through contracts with private yards for the construction of vessels, attractive bounties to industry, the taking over of state navies, and the purchase of ships and supplies from friendly European powers, it was obvious almost from the start that the Confederacy could not hope through conventional means to defend its coastline, nor raise the blockade which threatened to strangle it as the war progressed. The South was forced out of necessity to adopt novel methods and expedients such as the ironclad and the submarine, while the North, possessing almost all of the Navy and hierarchy of command which perhaps disposed it to the continuation of traditional naval policies, reacted more slowly initially.

Having little emotional or bureaucratic baggage to jettison, Mallory quickly saw the possibilities of ironclad ships, and gave them first priority, sending Lieutenant James H. North to London to work with Confederate agents in arranging for the purchase of construction of ironclads for the Confederacy.[2] However, the Confederates' lack of cold cash and the difficulty of passing ironclad ships off as merchantmen tended to frustrate these efforts, and Mallory was compelled to pursue a program of domestic construction which faced almost insurmountable odds — lack of rolling mills, lack of facilities capable of manufacturing marine engines, lack of skilled workmen, and difficulties of organization.[3] By the end of 1861, however, contracts for ironclads had been let and construction had begun on ten such vessels in the Southern states.[4]

Mallory's program of construction was spurred by reports of extensive preparations for the building of gunboats at St. Louis, which alarmed many observers in the western part of the Confederacy in the summer of 1861. On June 24, the Tennessee legislature petitioned Richmond for an immediate appropriation of $250,000 for the defense of the western rivers against the threat. Although President Jefferson Davis' interests lay more with land than naval operations, he laid the resolution before the Congress on July 31, which, nearly a month later, appropriated $160,000 for the construction of two ironclad gunboats, the "Arkansas" and the "Tennessee," for the defense of Memphis and the Mississippi River.[5]

But while the South's frenzied efforts to build an ironclad fleet for its defense progressed at a turtle's pace, in October of 1861, another ironclad, the "Manassas" became the first to see action. She had been contructed and reached the Confederate naval inventory by yet another of Mallory's expedients — privateering.

Although privateering as an instrument of national policy had fallen into disfavor among the leading nations of the world by the middle of the nineteenth century, the United States had not signed the Declaration of Paris which had abolished it, and the Confederate Congress, searching for private means of supplementing its naval power, passed a bill on May 6, 1861, which authorized President Davis to issue letters of marque against vessels and goods of the government of the United States. Under the law, private individuals or companies which captured vessels could receive twenty percent of the value of the ship and its cargo.[6]

Almost overnight, a fleet of privateers, hastily converted from peacetime pursuits, began to swarm the waters at the mouth of the Mississippi, waiting for Union ships returning from foreign ports, unware that war had made them fair game for private enterprise. Among the businessmen of New Orleans who

early saw the possibilities for profit in privateering was John A. Stevenson, secretary of the New Orleans Pilots' Association and a former river boat captain. In mid May, 1861, Stevenson and several business associates began to solicit $100,000 to finance the conversion of the "Enoch Train," a tugboat, into an ironclad ram capable of bringing the Yankee merchantmen to bay.[7] Whether promises of a good return on investments or appeals to patriotism were decisive is uncertain, but a meeting of interested investors at the Merchants' Exchange in New Orleans subscribed more than half of the required capital the first day.

The "Enoch Train" had originally been built at Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1855 as an icebreaker, but in 1859, she was brought to New Orleans for service as a tug boat. She was a single deck, two-masted vessel, 128 feet long, with a displacement of 385 tons, and her sturdy construction, necessary for the original task as an icebreaker, was no doubt a factor in her selection for conversion into a ram.[8]

Shortly after her purchase by the syndicate, the work of conversion began in secret at the John H. Hughes & Company shipyard at Algiers, across the river from New Orleans. Her superstructure was removed, an arched roof of 12 inch oak timber constructed over the deck, and a layer of railroad iron an inch and a half thick laid over the wood down to the water's edge. She was strengthened longitudinally with heavy 17 inch timbers, and her bow was filled in solidly with timbers to withstand the shock of ramming.[9] Although Private Utter described an iron prong on her bow about "8 or 10 feet long," it is impossible to confirm its length or construction from other contemporary accounts. Drawings of the "Manassas" do not show the prong, but it seems likely that it was under water since most of the ship was designed to move under the surface of the water and to present a very low profile.[10] Officially, the ram carried only one gun, a sixty-four pounder, rather than the two "eighty-four" pounders Utter mentioned. The gun, a nine-inch Dahlgren, which was obtained from the Navy Department through political influence, was fired through a small trap door with an iron shutter, which closed automatically after the gun was fired. The ship was also equipped with hoses to throw scalding water at anyone foolhardy enough to attempt to board her.[11]

Although the New Orleans press preserved the secrecy of the metamorphosis taking place across the river, rumors soon found their way into the Northern newspapers. One exaggerated account described the new ironclad as a "monster mosquito" and warned that it would "affix its sting" by nosing into its victim and boring a hole in its victim's side with an "augur" carried in its prow.[12] The "formidable mass of iron . . . in the form of a knob," it was feared, would steam downstream and clear the Mississippi of the Yankee fleet. David Porter, commanding officer of the Union warship "Brooklyn," however, foresaw no danger to the Yankee fleet from the "boat with the iron horn."[13]

Following the launching of the ram in August, the local press broke silence concerning her activities. The *True Delta,* describing the vessel's trial run on the river in early September, reported that "Something very like a whale was seen yesterday morning up and down the river below the city, and thousands of people sent out to see what they could see."[14] Although most observers agreed that her rounded back and riveted iron plates made her resemble a turtle, a variety of other apt descriptions greeted her appearances on the river: "a sharp-pointed egg," "a huge cigar," "a queer-looking customer," "a hellish engine," "a monster iron sea-reptile," "a black, whale-like looking beast," "a monster mosquito," and "a pygmy monster." Actually, the pri

vateer was christened the "Manassas" in honor of the South's recent victory over the Union army in Virginia. Curiously, although ships are usually referred to as being feminine, many references to the "Manassas" referred to "her" as "he."

Once the trials on the river were over, Stevenson and his associates applied to Richmond for the letter of marque necessary for her career as a privateer. Although the letter was promptly granted on September 12, 1861, she was destined never to sail as a buccaneer, enriching her investors and crew with Yankee prizes. The Confederate Navy, impressed with the experiments it had been conducting on the effects of explosive shells against armor, had concluded that Stevenson's newly-launched ironclad was necessary to insure the success of an assault it was planning against the Union blockaders below New Orleans, and ordered her seized.[15]

Accordingly, Lieutenant Alexander F. Warley was dispatched with a small force from the rebel ship "McRae" to take over the ram. Arriving dockside, Warley found the "Turtle's" crew of thirty-five men lined up on deck, swearing to kill the first man to board her. The Lieutenant, however, quickly climbed a ladder to the deck and, his face lined with determination, rushed up to the crew. Panicking, the crew "took to their heels and like so many prairie dogs disappeared down their hole of a hatchway with Mr. Warley after them. He drove them back on deck and then drove them ashore, some of them jumping overboard and swimming for it."[16] Stevenson, tears in his eyes, went meekly ashore, while the new captain assembled the few crewman who had remained on board and explained that under naval regulations, there would be no prize money. On hearing this, several of them took their bags and went ashore. But Warley had no trouble in finding volunteers from the Confederate fleet to fill their places, and Stevenson's sense of loss was assuaged some months later when Commodore George N. Hollins, who commanded the "mosquito fleet" which absorbed the "Manassas," was authorized to purchase her from Stevenson and his associates.[17]

His forces now bolstered by the ironclad, Hollins prepared to attack his target, a small fleet of Federal warships under the command of Captain "Honest John" Pope which had effectively blockaded the port of New Orleans by occupying a body of water known as "Head of the Passes," which controlled the several mouths of the Mississippi. Hollins' flotilla weighed anchor from the Crescent City on October 9, leaving the "Manassas" behind for emergency repairs. Already, she was proving to be, as Hollins dubbed her, "the most troublesome vessel of them all." But she was to prove at least as troublesome to her Yankee foes. Repairs made, the ram sailed just before noon of the next day. The levees of the port were thronged with citizens who had come to see the strange looking craft and to wish her well in battle. By nightfall, she had taken her place with the rest of Hollins' ships, and was anchored under the friendly guns of Fort Jackson.

Hollins decided to attack the enemy during the early morning hours of October 12, sending the "Manassas" as the lead ship, gliding noiselessly downstream with the current, to ram the first "suitable" target she might encounter. On signal from the ironclad, fire rafts lashed together by cables were to be released to drift down upon the Yankee ships, followed by the rest of the rebel ships, the "McRae," "Ivy," "Tuscarora," "Calhoun," and "Jackson."[18]

The Federal fleet, however, was not unaware of the possibility of an attack from upriver, and lay nervously at anchor at the "Head of the Passes"

twenty miles below New Orleans. Near the eastern bank of the river lay the flagship "Richmond," the "Preble," and the "Water Witch," while the "Vincennes" lay near the western shore. Despite expectations of an attack, no picket boats had been put out to warn of the approach of enemy ships.

The night was well-chosen for an attack. There was no moon, and the sky was overcast. Fog shrouded the river, and in the pre-dawn darkness, it was pitch black. The "Manassas," steered by First Officer Charles Austin, drifted soundlessly down with the current. Austin, peering through the four inch opening in the hatch, could see only a few feet straight in front of him.

Suddenly, out of the mist appeared the Federal flagship, the "Richmond." She was lying at anchor, leisurely taking on coal from the schooner, "Joseph H. Toone." Reacting quickly, Austin called to his engineer, "Let her out, Hardy, let her out now!" Hardy piled tar, tallow, and sulphur, which had been saved for the moment when the ram needed a sudden burst of speed, into the furnace, and the ram, making nearly ten knots with the current, ran full force into its target.

The impact was tremendous. The ram crushed in the planking of the coal schooner, driving her into the "Richmond" and tearing a two-foot hole in the flagship below the waterline. Aboard the stricken vessel, a red danger light was hoisted, "to quarters" was sounded, and the crew swarmed on deck, expecting the ship to sink momentarily.[19] But the schooner had shielded her from the full brunt of the ramming, and although seriously damaged, she remained afloat. The "Manassas," however, had also suffered injury. Every man had been thrown rudely to the deck by the concussion, and the engines had been damaged. Austin gave the order to reverse the engines, and the ram slid off her victim. A moment later, Austin spotted the "Preble" and gave the order to ram her: "Now let her out, Hardy, and give it to her." This time, however, the engines did not respond to the tar, tallow, and sulfur. The engineer replied that the ramming had broken a condenser, and the engines were practically useless. The "Turtle" passed harmlessly by the "Preble" and began to drift lazily on the river.

According to Hollins' plan, a midshipman on the ram then went on deck to fire a rocket to signal the rest of the Confederate fleet, waiting upstream, to attack. In his excitement, however, the sailor lit the rocket and held on to it. It burned his hand, and when he let go of it, it roared down the open hatch into the hold, where the crew, thinking it was a shell, dived wildly for cover. The midshipman's second try was more successful, and presently the fire raft began to drift down toward the Union ships, lighting up the bizarre scene.

As the "Manassas" began to circle idly without power on the river, the Union ships began to fire broadsides blindly into the darkness in her general direction. But the back of the "Turtle" was so low that at close range, the guns could not depress far enough to reach her, and all but two or three of the shells passed harmlessly over her.[20] One of the rounds, however, put a dent in the iron deck, and another clipped off one of the smokestacks, dropping it over the opening of the other stack, which had been torn off a few moments earlier by a hawser from the coal schooner. With the vent closed, choking fumes from the tar and sulphur began to fill the hold, threatening to suffocate the crew or drive them out on the exposed deck. Engineer Hardy grabbed an axe and headed topside to dispose of the offending smokestack. Realizing that Hardy probably could not keep his footing on the deck while swinging the axe, Austin followed him on deck and held his ankles while he chopped away the guy wires and dropped the stack overboard.[21]

Although the "Manassas" began to limp its way slowly upriver, panic seized the Yankee fleet, which began to weigh anchor, seeking to escape the iron monster and the fire rafts and gunboats drifting down upon them. In the excitement, both the "Richmond" and the "Vincennes" went aground. The former soon managed to free itself, but although her crew began to throw guns and ammunition overboard in an effort to lighten the load, the "Vincennes" remained fast on the sand bar. In the confusion, Captain Pope's signal from the "Richmond" to "get underway" was mistaken aboard the "Vincennes" for an order to "abandon ship." The captain and crew went over the side, while the last man aboard, the quartermaster, lit a fuse leading to the ship's magazine. Captain Pope's surprise and consternation can well be imagined when, a few minutes later, the skipper of the "Vincennes" came aboard, draped in an American flag, and announced dramatically that he had abandoned ship! Fortunately for him, the quartermaster had thought better of blowing up his ship, and had extinguished the fuse before leaving her. The embarrassed captain and crew were able to board ship again, and a short while later the vessel joined the headlong flight of the Union fleet down the Southwest Passage to the Gulf. Fortunately for the Yankees, this little drama had played itself out before an empty theatre, for Hollins, after exchanging a few long range salvos with the retreating foe had decided to turn his ships around and head upstream.[22]

The news of the rout of the Union fleet raised spirits throughout Dixie, and the Memphis *Daily Avalanche* concluded that it was necessary only to turn the "Turtle" loose to demolish the whole of Mr. Lincoln's navy.[23] In New Orleans, Hollins termed the engagement "a complete success" and was given a hero's welcome that evening. Bands serenaded him at his headquarters at the St. Charles Hotel, and grateful citizens presented him gifts. Far downstream, E. F. Devens, executive officer of the salvaged "Vincennes," wrote, "I truly feel ashamed of our side."[24]

But the tortoise seldom really wins the race, and Southern notions of victory were considerably exaggerated. Not one Yankee ship had been sunk in the foray, and the rout of the fleet had no effect on the blockade. To be sure, the Union fleet had been humiliated by the first ironclad to see action in America, but the mouth of the Mississippi, an important lifeline to the Confederacy, remained closed tightly.[25]

The battle over, the crippled "Manassas" was taken in tow upriver to a dock near New Orleans for extensive repairs to her engines. But with the Yankee fleet still lurking in the lower reaches of the Mississippi, New Orleans was not safe from attack. However, Confederate intelligence minimized this danger, and daily brought disturbing details from St. Louis concerning the rapid progress James B. Eads was making at the shipyards there in building a fleet of ironclad gunboats which would sweep down the Mississippi to imperil the Crescent City from the north. In the next few months, it was necessary to shift vessels up and down the river, and the movements of the "Manassas," an integral part of the defense of New Orleans, whatever the direction of attack, remain shrouded in the mists of history. It seems probable that, her battle injuries healed, she moved upriver from Memphis in early December, when Private Utter sighted her, and again in February of 1862, before returning to New Orleans in time to meet the Union attack on that city in late April.[26] When she returned to New Orleans after Private Utter saw her is uncertain, but she was sighted off Pass a l'Outre below that city on New Years Day, and was reported in drydock undergoing repairs at New Orleans on January 18. On January 31, Lieutenant Robert Minor reported to Secretary Mallory that repairs on the "Manassas" were completed, and she was ready for service.[27]

Seaworthy once more, the "troublesome vessel" again ascended the river under the command of Commodore Hollins to meet the growing threat of the Eads ironclads. However, bad luck continued to plague the ram, and she soon struck a snag in the river and was forced once more to return to dry dock, this time in Memphis.[28] Hollins' fleet, which consisted roughly of the same vessels that he had taken upstream in December, remained for more than a month below New Madrid, in the vicinity of Tiptonville, engaging General Pope's shore batteries.[29] By early April, however, Hollins had begun to doubt his ability to stop the Union gunboats should they pass Island No. 10. Moreover, Farragut's real intentions of attacking New Orleans rather than Mobile or Galveston had become clear, and when William C. Whittle, commander of the New Orleans Naval Station wired Hollins directly from New Orleans to request that everything afloat be sent immediately to that city's defense, he complied with the urgent summons.[30]

Her damage repaired, the "Turtle" rejoined Hollins' ships at New Orleans and became a part of a heterogeneous force which also included the unfinished super ironclads the "Louisiana" and the "Mississippi," the state-owned gunboats "Governor Moore" and "General Quitman," and six vessels belonging to the so-called "River Defense Fleet." These last vessels were river steamers whose bows had been strengthened for ramming purposes, and were under the command of none other than John A. Stevenson, the original builder of the "Manassas."[31]

Most worrisome to the commander of the attacking Union fleet, David G. Farragut, were the two new powerful ironclad rams under the command of John K. Mitchell, who assumed command of all naval forces at New Orleans on April 20. But the "Mississippi" was only two-thirds completed, and played no real role in the ensuing battle for the city, and the "Louisiana," lacking engines to propel her, was little more than a floating battery. Had Farragut been aware of the unprepared state of the ships, he might have been even more confident of success. As it was, he predicted that his ships would "run over" the Confederate rams.

Working its way upriver, Farragut's fleet opened fire on Forts Jackson and St. Philip, which stood guard downstream on the approaches to New Orleans, on Good Friday, April 18. Meanwhile, shifts of workers labored day and night to complete the "Louisiana," anchored just above Fort St. Philip. Without the firepower of the "Louisiana," Mitchell felt the Confederate cause was virtually hopeless. But by the time of the Union attack on April 24, only six guns were ready, and even these could not be depressed far enough to be effective against enemy attack.

At two o'clock in the morning of April 24, Farragut's flagship, the "Hartford," hoisted two red lanterns to signal the fleet to weigh anchor and begin the attack which would ultimately capture New Orleans.[32] Farragut divided his fleet into three groups. The first group, which consisted of six gunboats and two sloops-of-war, was to engage Fort St. Philip, while the main force proceeded in column, passing through a narrow gate made in the line of hulks which had been chained together to serve as a barrier across the river just below the forts. The third force, consisting of six gunboats, was to follow the main attack.

The attack was not discovered until about 3:40 a.m., when the twin forts opened fire on the column of ships which was breaching the barrier.

Upstream the "Manassas" lay moored to the bank above Fort St. Philip

her bow pointed upstream. At the first sound of firing, Lieutenant Warley ordered the lines to the bank cut and headed the ram out into the main current. Heading downstream, Warley soon observed the silhouette of an enemy warship, and quickly gave orders for full steam ahead. Unfortunately, the ram collided with the "Resolute," one of the vessels belonging to the Confederate Army's "River Defense Fleet," which had turned tail at the first shot and was heading upstream. Little damage was done to either vessel, but by the time the "Manassas" could reverse its engines and free itself from the sister ship, the enemy vessel had disappeared into the darkness, fog, and smoke.

Undaunted, Warley made a lunge at the next Federal warship he saw, but, misjudging her speed, merely grazed her. Moments later, a large sidewheeler appeared out of the fog, angling across the river toward the "Manassas." Warley must have felt mixed emotions as he recognized the Union warship as the "Mississippi," the last vessel on which he had served prior to the secession of the southern states in 1861.

Aboard the "Mississippi," Lieutenant George Dewey, who was to win fame at Manila a generation later, spotted "what appeared to be the back of an enormous turtle, painted lead color," and immediately gave the order to run her down.[33] A moment later, the "Turtle," her speed augmented by the swift current of the flooding river and firing her gun as she approached, struck the side-wheeler. But once again, Fate played the "Manassas" false, and she struck the "Mississippi" a glancing blow at a point protected by heavy anchor chains which had been draped over the sides for protection. Although the damage proved on later examination to be extensive, the "Mississippi" disengaged, fired a broadside at her antagonist which passed harmlessly overhead, and churned on up the river into the darkness.[34]

Undamaged by her brief encounter with the "Mississippi," the "Manassas" continued downstream in the valiant effort to halt the enemy advance toward New Orleans. Intercepting the "Pensacola" as she attempted to run by the twin forts, Warley again called for a full head of steam. The more agile Union craft, however, avoided the ram, shooting her flagstaff off as she went by and continuing upriver. In the vicinity of the breached Confederate barrier, the "Manassas" came under heavy fire from the friendly guns of Fort St. Philip, whose commander assumed she was a disabled enemy ship drifting downstream, and gave orders to engage her. In the next few minutes, more than seventy-five shells raked the ram, which quickly convinced Warley of the wisdom of following the Union attackers back upstream.

The river was ablaze with muzzle flashes, flames lunging from the hulks of several ships of the ill-fated "River Defense Fleet," and bonfires lit ashore to aid the gunners firing from the forts. Smoke and fog mingled on the river to confuse crewmen and captains alike, and gave the scene an aura of unreality which belied the vital significance of the battle which raged among the leaping shadows.

A few moments later, the "Turtle" stumbled upon the "Brooklyn," and prepared to ram her. Firing her single gun as she neared her adversary, she struck her abreast of the mainmast with tremendous force. Again, chains secured to the sides of the ship saved the ship from severe damage, and the shell, also deflected by the chains, came to rest in a barrier of sand bags only inches from the boiler.[35] The "Brooklyn" limped off into the darkness to lick her wounds. Meanwhile, aboard the "Manassas," the force of the collision put her gun out of commission and jarred the boiler from its mountings (pinning the engineer against the bulkhead), almost destroying her engines.

Churning haltingly on up the river, the "Turtle," reduced now to a pace all too reminiscent of her namesake, encountered the "Iroquois," which easily evaded her feeble attempt to ram her and continued on her way unmolested. Minutes later, the "Manassas" came upon a desperate struggle. Her sister ship, the "McRae," was being mercilessly raked by three Union gunboats, which had disabled her and killed most of her crew. On sighting the fabled iron monster, however, the Union ships fled the scene without a fight.

Dawn was breaking on the river when the "Manassas" chugged around a bend in the river and stumbled onto the bulk of Farragut's fleet. On orders from Farragut, the "Mississippi," which had already made the acquaintance of the "Manassas" earlier that morning, and the "Kineo" headed toward her, picking up speed with the swift current. Despite the dire condition of his engines, Warley cleverly managed to avoid the rush of the "Mississippi," a vessel almost five times her size.[36]

Realizing that the ram could not fight and that it could not elude the Union warships, Warley made a difficult decision. The "Manassas," he reported later, "was perforated in the fight by shot and shell as if she had been made of paper." With her engines and gun gone, "I considered that I had done all that I possibly could do to resist the enemy's passage of the forts, and that it then became my duty to try and save the people under my command."[37] Accordingly, he ordered the delivery pipes cut and ran the ram into a steep part of the river bank. Then he ordered the officers and men to flee to the safety of the swamps.

The ordeal of the "Turtle" and her crew was not over. The "Mississippi" drew along the beached vessel and delivered a hail of shells into her, knocking away her smokestacks and setting her afire. From time to time, the gun crews shifted their fire to rain shells and grape shot into the swamp in the direction of the fleeing crew.[38] Finally, the shock of the firing caused the ram to slide off the bank and float crazily downstream, dipping and eddying like a leaf on the water.

Commander David D. Porter of the Union fleet described the proud ram's last moments:

> "She was . . . beginning to emit smoke from her ports, or holes, and was discovered to be on fire and sinking. Her pipes were all twisted and riddled with shot, and her hull was also well cut up. She had evidently been used up by the squadron as they passed along. I tried to save her as a curiosity, getting a hawser around her and securing her to the bank, but just after doing so she faintly exploded. Her only gun went off, and emitting flames through her port bow, like some huge animal, she gave a plunge and disappeared under the water."[39]

With the "Turtle," the last real obstacle to Farragut's squadron, resting in her watery grave, the surrender of the city of New Orleans followed shortly. And with the loss of that key port, the fate of the Confederate cause in the West was virtually sealed. But the gallant efforts of the officers and crew of the "Manassas" should not go unrewarded in the pages of history. One would like to note that the exploits of that fearsome iron beast, marked, it is true, from time to time with comedy and human error while representing a significant advance in the art of naval warfare, inaugurated the era of the ironclad in America and these exploits thus stand as a landmark in our nation's history. But to modern school children, the name "Manassas" brings to mind a Virginia land battle, and the colorful chapter of its namesake was soon overshadowed

and reduced to an unread footnote by the dramatic duel of the "Merrimac" and the "Monitor" at Hamption Roads.[40]

Even these two famed vessels, however, did little toward the immediate adoption of the ironclad by the Navy after the war. Following Appomattox, unfinished ironclads in the shipyards were dismantled and, in 1868, Congress authorized the sale of the remaining monitors in the fleet. Curiously, when troubles with England over the Alabama Claims threatened to lead to war a few years later, the Navy turned toward the construction of wooden cruisers, not ironclads![41]

Although she has been ill-served by history, the "Manassas" occupied for a brief time center stage in a vital theatre of the Civil War. Her movements were followed closely by both contesting nations, and her exploits brought needed hope to the cause of the Confederacy. Although she was plagued by accidents and mechanical failure, she stood ready on a moment's notice to do battle against uneven odds. Of all of the Confederate men-of-war on the western rivers, she was the most aggressive and gave the Union fleet the most difficult time. She was indeed, as Commodore Hollins had said, "the most troublesome vessel of them all."

1. Letter, W. L. Utter to Miss Jennie Alexander, from Columbus, Kentucky, December 8, 1861. Errors in punctuation have been reproduced without correction. Utter mentions his home town as "Denmark." Since he writes of expecting his father to come for a visit, it is assumed that he was from Denmark, Tennessee, a small town near Jackson. The letter was acquired recently by the Special Collections Department, University Library, Murray State University.
2. Robert MacBride, **Civil War Ironclads; The Dawn of Naval Armor** (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1962), p. 75. Actually, the ironclad was not a new idea at all. The development of the large calibre rifle and the shell gun following the War of 1812 had spurred the British and French in the 1820s and 1830s to develop smaller and faster warships which mounted only a few heavy guns. These guns, which penetrated the sides of wooden ships and splintered them with an explosion, instead of merely punching holes in them as the solid shot had, spelled the eventual doom of wooden ships. In the aftermath of the Crimean War in the 1850s, both the British and French began to experiment with vessels with armored sides. Curiously, these ships still carried the traditional sailing rigging and masts. At the beginning of the Civil War, there was not one ironclad ship in the United States Navy.
3. One of the largest rolling mills in the South, Daniel Hillman and Company of Kentucky, declined to enter into contract with the Confederacy since it risked seizure by Union troops only forty miles away in Ohio.
4. The Confederate Department of the Navy authorized the construction of its first ironclad in June; however, work had already begun to convert the captured "USS Merrimac" into the "CSS Virginia," an ironclad vessel. Not until July 4, 1861, did Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy in the North, ask for authorization to build ironclads "providing that competent investigation proved them feasible." A month later, Congress passed a bill which directed the Secretary of the Navy to appoint a board of three naval officers to investigate plans and specifications for ironclads, and appropriated $1,500,000 for their construction. Interestingly, the board of officers, which foresaw the value of ironclads in rivers and harbors, also evaluated proposals for a rubber-clad vessel. **Ibid.**, pp. 8-12. **Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion** (Washington, 1921), Series II, Vol. 2, p. 783. (Hereinafter cited as **O.R.N.**)
5. Under terms of the contract, the ironclads were to be completed by December 24. The contractors, however, faced immense difficulties. Saw mills had to be built, and lumber in some instances had to be shipped over 100 miles by railroad. Iron had to be purchased in small lots wherever it could be found, and the lack of cooperation from the military, notably General Leonidas Polk, put construction well behind schedule. In fact, the "Ten-

nessee" was never completed, and was burned to prevent its falling into the hands of the Yankees, who were advancing down the river to Memphis. John Thomas Scharf, **History of the Confederate States Navy, From Its Organization to the Surrender of Its Last Vessel** (New York: Rogers & Sherwood, 1887), p. 303. An additional $50,000 was earmarked for the construction of gunboats to defend the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers, and Lieutenant Isaac N. Brown was sent to Nashville to purchase and arm steamers for that purpose.

6. **Journal of the Congress of the Confederate States of America,** 7 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), I, 177.
7. Stevenson, who figured that Union warships would soon control the mouth of the river, felt that only an ironclad had much prospect for success.
8. William Morrison Robinson, Jr., **The Confederate Privateers** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928), p. 37. Charles L. Dufour, **The Night the War Was Lost** (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1960), p. 71.
9. **Ibid.** Some sources list the thickness of the roof as twelve inches, although Lieutenant Alexander Warley, who commanded her in battle, gave it as no more than five inches. Estimates of the thickness of the iron covering range from three-fourths of an inch to an inch and a half. Robinson, **Confederate Privateers,** p. 156; MacBride, **Civil War Ironclads,** p. 126; Maurice Melton, **The Confederate Ironclads** (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1968), p. 60.
10. A letter written by a Union sympathizer in New Orleans in late July, which had been seen by the American Consul in Hamburg, reported that the hull projected only two and a half feet above the water. Although the sympathizer referred to the ram's "terrible engine power" and speed, in reality she was too slow for use on the high seas as a privateer, and found it difficult to make much headway against the swift current of the Mississippi. Probably her top speed was no more than four knots. **O.R.N.,** I, Vol. 16, p. 747. MacBride, **Civil War Ironclads,** p. 126.
11. According to Edward N. Tidball, Chief Clerk of the Navy Department, he was ordered to furnish the gun and ammunition for the "Manassas" on July 2, 1861. At this point, it is noted that the ram was a privately-owned vessel. **O.R.N.,** II, Vol. 1, p. 792.
12. **New York Commercial Advertiser,** August, 1861, in Robinson, **Confederate Privateers,** p. 155. **O.R.N.,** I, Vol. 16, p. 747.
13. Dufour, **The Night the War Was Lost,** pp. 72-73.
14. **The True Delta,** September 21, 1861, in Robinson, **Confederate Privateers,** p. 155. **O.R.N.,** I, Vol. 16, pp. 746-747.
15. **O.R.N.,** II, Vol. 1, pp. 259, 382-385, 725. **O.R.N.,** I, Vol. 16, p.747.
16. James M. Morgan, **Recollections of a Rebel Reefer** (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), p. 54.
17. **O.R.N.,** II, Vol. 1, pp. 472, 517, 725.
18. Dufour, **The Night the War Was Lost,** p. 77. William N. Still, Jr., **Iron Afloat** (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971), pp. 48-49.
19. On October 16, her skipper reported, "three of her outside planks under the port fore channels are broken below the water line between two timbers, causing a considerable leak, which has been temporarily stopped . . ." **O.R.N.,** I, Vol. 16, p. 718. Warley was later taken to task by Confederate naval authorities for failing to fire the ram's gun as he approached the "Richmond."
20. **Ibid.,** I, Vol. 16, p. 730a.
21. Dufour, **The Night the War Was Lost,** p. 79.
22. Still, **Iron Afloat,** pp. 50-51. Given the Confederate commander's earlier emphasis on the value of the ironclad ram to his fleet, the crippling of the "Manassas" may have had something to do with his decision to head upstream. Although the ram had failed to send any of the Union ships to the bottom, its psychological impact upon the Yankees was considerable!
23. **O.R.N.,** I, Vol. 16, p. 729.
24. **Ibid.,** pp. 728-730a. Fletcher Pratt, **Civil War on Western Waters** (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1956), p. 51. Melton, **The Confederate Ironclads,** pp. 67-71. Dufour, **The Night the War Was Lost,** p. 83.
25. Still, **Iron Afloat,** p. 51.
26. Convinced that Farragut would attack either Mobile or Galveston rather than New Orleans, Hollins moved his fleet upriver to meet the threat posed by the Eads ironclads

in early December. Captain J. K. Mitchell, testifying before a board of inquiry in 1862, reported that there were no Confederate vessels at New Orleans when he arrived there in early December, 1861. All of them had been sent up to the vicinity of Columbus. **O.R.N.**, II, Vol. 1, pp. 327, 452-454. Besides the "Manassas," the fleet included the "McRae," "Livingston," "Maurepas," "General Polk," "Ponchartrain," and "Ivy."

27. **O.R.N.**, I, Vol. 17, pp. 31, 91. Still, **Iron Afloat**, p. 52.
28. Apparently General Mansfield Lovell, who was in charge of land defenses at New Orleans, had requested the return of the ram early in March, 1862. Hollins replied to General P.G.T. Beauregard's telegram of March 12, that he could not spare the "Manassas," but on March 15, he cabled Beauregard that the ram had been ordered back to New Orleans as requested, "though from some injury received from a 'snag' I fear she will be detained some days in Memphis to repair." **The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies** (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1882), Series I, Vol. 22, pp. 673, 738.
29. General Beauregard expressed his thanks to Hollins in a telegram dated March 12: "Thanks for efficient aid before New Madrid." **Ibid.**, p. 737.
30. Because Whittle did not even bother to touch base with the government in Richmond, he incurred the severe displeasure of authorities there. Since Hollins' fleet was almost out of ammunition, it seems doubtful that it could have done very much to arrest the Yankee advance down the Mississippi. The loss of Forts Henry and Donelson in February breached the Confederate defense line which was anchored in the west by Columbus, and the withdrawal of the rebel forces on the upper part of the river was only a matter of time. Island No. 10 fell to General Pope on April 8, 1861, **War of the Rebellion**, I, Vol. 8, p. 777.
31. Francis Trevelyan Miller, ed., **The Photographic History of the Civil War**, 10 Volumes (New York: The Review of Reviews Co., 1912), VI, 192-196. Pratt, **Civil War on Western Waters**, p. 83.
32. For the best accounts of the second battle of New Orleans, see Pratt, **Civil War on Western Waters**, pp. 87-91, Still, **Iron Afloat**, pp. 55-61, Dufour, **The Night the War Was Lost**, pp. 265-285, and Scharf, **History of the Confederate States Navy**, pp. 278-302.
33. George Dewey, **Autobiography of George Dewey, Admiral of the Navy** (New York: Charles Schribner's Sons, 1916), pp. 63-65.
34. By Dewey's own account, the blow sheared off fifty copper bolts and took out a section of solid timber seven by four feet. The shell came to rest in the ship's cabin.
35. **O.R.N.**, I, Vol. 18, pp. 182, 198, 336. Commander Bell of the "Brooklyn" reported three months later that the collision with the "Manassas" had caused a bad leak which would make it necessary for the vessel to undergo extensive repairs before it could proceed to sea.
36. Miller, **Photographic History**, VI, 200.
37. **War of the Rebellion**, I, Vol. 6, p. 604. **O.R.N.**, I, Vol. 18, p. 303.
38. Warley, himself, was subsequently captured when he crossed the river. Later in the war, he commanded the Confederate ships "Chicora" and "Albemarle."
39. The flames devouring the interior of the ram had reached powder charges, stored under Lieutenant Warley's bunk, which exploded. **O.R.N.**, I, Vol. 18, p. 358.
40. Indeed, ironclad warships soon became known as "monitors," a term preferrable, it must be admitted, to "turtles."
41. MacBride, **Civil War Ironclads**, p. 5.